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ABSTRACT

The body of folk wisdom and research on the characteristics of successful developmental educators indicates, among other findings, that: (1) the single most important factor influencing learning is not the teacher but what the learner already knows; (2) excellence in teaching involves a genuine concern for students; (3) successful instructors are flexible, willing to learn from students, and able to create environments where all learners gain; (4) exceptional teachers have the ability to plan and present goals to students so that students see a connection between class work and job skills; have a respect for students; use a variety of techniques to encourage student participation; and give academic feedback to students and adjust teaching to provide specific remediation opportunities; and (5) the excellent instructor understands students and meets their needs because he/she demands excellence, and has skills and knowledge, the ability to generate motivation, and organizational talents. Most of the qualities of superior teachers identified in the literature fall under the self-actualization category of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The implications of these findings are, first, that there is a difference between instructing and teaching/mentoring; second, instructors must demand excellence; and, third, instructors can become successful. A 27-item bibliography is included. (UCM)

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REVIEW OF

RESEARCH
in Developmental Education

Gene Kerstiens, Editor

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Characteristics of Successful Developmental Educators

by Dennis Gabriel

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Characteristics of Successful Developmental Educators

by Dennis Gabriel

Many years ago, a story begins, the Federal Government decided to find out which reading program was the best way to teach reading. After an analysis of many programs and studies, researchers concluded that the key was the individual teacher and a good program. Practitioners still search for a program to turn out super students. Yet, ever since the Hawthorne experiments, researchers have known that attention to people has the greatest impact on productivity. In industry, researchers such as Peters and Waterman, Jr. (1982) have concluded "Nothing is more powerful than positive reinforcement" (p. 269). Perhaps, the education industry should look to the individual instructor to learn what instructor characteristics work best with students.

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

There has never been a shortage of lists of characteristics of successful teachers. Developing solid documentation of successful developmental educators' characteristics is not easy, however. The problems researchers face are obvious—how to isolate the learners' drives, work habits, and so on from whatever it is that the teacher does; how to account for the students' time on task. Nevertheless, there is a body of folk wisdom and research on successful educators. Since folk wisdom is an important part of the education industry, it can not be ignored.

Folk Wisdom

As president of the Western College Reading Association, Joffe (1970) proffered standards for college reading teachers. Joffe suggested that the first requirement is a teacher who knows how to teach skills (not simply expose the class to skills) and is sensitive to the emotional and psychological needs of the students (pp. 93-100).

Kerstiens (1972), president of the Western College Reading Association, defined *professionalism* based upon observations of the education industry over a period of 20 years. Among other traits, he noted that professionals communicate, are doers, exact rigorous demands, are self-confident, believe in the importance of what they do, probe the instructional future, are cautious of textbook approaches and answers, read the professional literature and share the ideas at conferences, and are aware that professional excellence ultimately comes with self-examination (p. 1).

In the *Reading Instruction Journal*, Kerstiens (1972) viewed instructors who work effectively with underprepared students as innovators. Innovators have several characteristics in common—first, they are not afraid of underprepared students (they respect students in an age of the cooling out of open enrollment); second, they are sensitive observers of a superannuated academic arena and, therefore, are able to drop the baggage of the past to try new approaches; third, they are adventuresome in their use of technology (pp. 49-50).

Roueche (1982) spelled out qualities of great teachers: build involvement with learners, create learning environments, model qualities they wish others to integrate, use appropriate reinforcement strategies, and demonstrate professional commitment (p. 23).

Summarizing the Promoting Great Teaching Conference (Clark et al., 1982), the steering committee commented that the most intriguing theme dealt with personality characteristics of great teachers. The characteristics most often mentioned were enthusiasm, knowledge and competency, stimulating and lively presentation, organization, willingness for self-disclosure, interest in improving the quality of teaching, and willingness to meet with students outside class (p. 34).

Greive (1983) summarized the characteristics of effective teachers as those who know their students, are prepared, are dynamic, are warm and human, and spend time with students (p. x).

According to Thompson (1986), Lowman sees effective classroom instruction as a dramatic setting for intellectual discourse. Interactions operate on many levels including the emotional and symbolic; the good instructor must, therefore, be sensitive and have an acute sense of self (p. 15-17).

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Surveys

Not all of the research suggests that the teacher is the key factor in a student's learning. Ausubel (1968) noted that "the single most important factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows" (p. vi). Hirsch (1987) agreed: "What distinguishes good readers from poor ones is simply the possession of a lot of diverse, task-specific information" (p. 61). Ausubel claims that very few studies on the personality characteristics of successful teachers are illuminating. Although students respond to an instructor's personality, Ausubel notes that "teachers' personality characteristics have *not* been highly correlated with effectiveness in teaching. The two principal exceptions to this generalization are warmth and understanding, on the one hand, and a tendency to be stimulating and imaginative on the other" (pp. 453-454).

Roueche and Watkins (1982) summarized research on effective teaching. They noted that a study by Hildebrand and Wilson (1973) pointed out that excellence in teaching involved an instructor with a genuine concern for students: excellent instructors were eager and enthusiastic with the ability to be clear and organized. Roueche and Watkins also noted that Klemp (cited in Roueche & Watkins, 1982) cited three key areas: cognitive skills (synthesize and learn from experiences); interpersonal skills such as empathy and positive expectations; and motivation in an assessment of outstanding performers. A study by Schneider, Klemp, and Kastendick (1981) focused upon effective teachers as individuals who have high expectations and demand excellence. Roueche and Watkins echo the Schneider, Klemp, and Kastendick study: "Excellent faculty are those who engage students in their own learning while demanding excellence" (p. 23).

Gruenberg (1983) surveyed 300 colleges on items including effective teacher qualities. Her successful instructors were flexible, willing to learn from students, and willing to create environments where all learners gain. High academic standards coupled with a nurturing attitude, a wide variety of interests, and the ability to encourage independence in students were additional qualities identified in her survey of effective teachers.

To determine competencies for effective teaching in community colleges, Hirst and Bailey (1983) sent questionnaires to 225 instructors in 19 Kansas community colleges. Their 70 resulting competencies were then organized into four categories: course content, instructional method, instructor behavior, and student behavior. The instructor behavior competencies which were rated highly important were respect for students, interest in the subject, classroom expectations, eye contact, verbal skills, respect for students' contributions, and understanding of students' frustrations (p. 4).

Easton, Forrest, Goldman, and Ludwig (1984) studied effective instructors in introductory composition, math, social science, and biology. Instructors were recommended by administrators and were selected as models on the basis of students' high grade point average. The study included four samplings, one conducted at the University of Chicago and three others at urban community colleges. Findings confirmed a 1983 study by Guskey and Easton since, in both, the same four categories were found characteristic of exceptional teachers.

The first element (found in 93 percent of the sample) was the ability to plan and present goals to students so that students saw a connection between class work and job skills, the curriculum, and life (Easton et al., 1984, pp. 8-10).

The second element (found in 89 percent of the instructors) was a respect for students manifested in three areas: interest in students, classroom atmosphere, and class expectations. Interest was shown by the instructors' learning students' names and backgrounds. Excellent teachers (64 percent) used get-acquainted activities, seating charts, or returned homework assignments to learn names. A relaxed classroom atmosphere made students feel at ease. The instructors (89 percent) communicated a belief that students could do the work; thus, students developed a sense of responsibility for the instructors' high expectations (Easton et al., 1984, pp. 10-12).

The third characteristic, evidenced by 90 percent of the instructors, was the use of a variety of techniques to encourage student participation. First, instructors asked questions to monitor students' progress. Second, the instructors encouraged students to ask questions in order to draw them out. Third, the instructors related course materials to the students' lives through field trips, newspapers, television programs, etc. Students were also taught to take an active part in the learning situation by asking questions of each other (Easton et al., 1984, pp. 12-14).

Fourth, over 90 percent of the teachers observed and noted students' progress, gave academic feedback to students, and adjusted teaching to provide specific remediation opportunities. The most common means of observing and reporting student progress were tests, papers, and question and answer sessions. Most teachers tried to solve problems in class; then they suggested individual conferences; and finally they sent students to learning centers or counselors (Easton et al., 1984, pp. 14-16).

Parker and Magnesen (1986) surveyed adjunct faculty at Triton College to determine which instructors faculty remembered from their own first two years of college. The outstanding instructors were rated high on knowledge, organization, responsiveness to student needs, enthusiasm for subject, and friendliness. Poor instructors were remembered as dry and aloof, not prepared, uncaring, disrespectful toward students, not knowledgeable, and unable to communicate effectively (p. 1).

Table 1

Maslow's Needs and Educators' Characteristics

Love/social needs (N = 10; 12%)

- responsive to student's needs (Parker)
- friendly and personable (Parker)
- enthusiastic instructional approach (Burnham)
- likes students (Burnham)
- makes students feel at ease (Burnham)
- builds involvement with learners (Roueche)
- time for students out of class (Clark et al.)
- spends time with students (Greive)
- kind and helpful (Hunt)
- know their students (Greive)

Esteem needs (N = 26; 32%)

- are prepared (Greive)
- create learning environment (Roueche; Gruenberg)
- students know classroom expectation (Hirst)
- well organized (Parker)
- monitor and report student progress (Easton)
- organization (Clark et al.)
- know how to teach (Joffe)
- exact rigorous demands (Kerstiens)
- knowledge of subject (Parker)
- academic rigor and expectation (Gruenberg)
- interest in the subject (Hirst)
- eye contact, verbal skills (Hirst)
- appropriate reinforcement stragegies (Roueche)
- knowledge and competency (Clark et al.)
- use technology (Kerstiens)
- cautious of book answers (Kerstiens)
- probe instructional future (Kerstiens)
- belief in importance of their work (Kerstiens)
- knowledge of developmental tools (Burnham)
- encourage independence (Gruenberg)
- improve quality of teaching (Clark et al.)
- clear and organized (Hildebrand & Wilson)
- high student expectations (Schneider et al.)
- demand excellence (Schneider et al.; Roueche)

Self-actualization level (N = 46; 56%)

- dynamic (Greive)
- warm (Greive)
- respect students (Kerstiens)
- sensitive observers of academic scene (Kerstiens)
- try new approaches (Kerstiens)
- communicate (Kerstiens)
- doers (Kerstiens)
- self-confident (Kerstiens)
- sensitive to students' emotional and psychological needs (Joffe)
- enthusiasm for subject (Parker)
- sees self as learner (Burnham)
- understanding of community needs (Burnham)
- commitment to underachiever and the college mission (Burnham)
- sensitivity to human relations (Burnham)
- recognition of students' interests (Burnham)
- sensitive to the young adult (Burnham)
- ability to work with older adults (Burnham)
- ability to endure failure (Burnham)
- belief that students can learn (Burnham)
- capacity for humor (Burnham)
- willing to learn from students (Gruenberg)
- flexible (Gruenberg)
- nurturing attitude (Gruenberg
- variety of interests (Gruenberg)
- respect for students (Hirst)
- students' contributions respected (Hirst)
- instructor understands students' frustrations (Hirst)
- respect their students (Easton)
- sense of goals (Easton)
- encourage participation (Easton)
- eager and enthusiastic (Hildebrand & Wilson)
- practice what they preach (Roueche)
- professional commitment to teaching (Roueche)
- enthusiasm about teaching (Clark et al.)
- stimulating and lively presentation (Baker)
- willingness for self-disclosure (Baker)
- read and share ideas (Kerstiens)
- self-examination (Kerstiens)
- sensitive toward people (Lowman)
- sense of self (Lowman)
- stimulating and imaginative (Ausubel)
- warmth and understanding (Ausubel)
- assistance/empathy/positive expectations (Klemp)
- motivated (Klemp)
- show consideration (Hart)
- flexible (Burnham)

After he surveyed practitioners in developmental education, Burnham (1987), president of Schenectady County Community College, reported 33 competencies necessary for teaching developmental students. The first set of items on Burnham's list identified components of good instructors' attitudes:

- sees self as learner
- enthusiastic instructional approach
- understanding of community needs
- commitment to underachiever and the college mission
- sensitivity to human relations
- recognition of students' interests
- sensitivity to the psychology of the young adult
- ability to work with older students
- ability to endure failure and persist promoting student learning
- knowledge of developmental tools
- belief that students can learn
- likes students
- makes students feel at ease
- flexibility
- capacity for humor

The second set related to instructional skills.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH

In 1934, Hart reported that students respond favorably to instructors who help students, are kind, and show consideration of students' feelings. In the last 50 years what have we learned?

Ausubel (1968) claimed that the research over the past 50 years has neither been clear nor useful since there is no "satisfactory criterion against which to measure teacher effectiveness. Ratings of teacher performance are notoriously unreliable, superficial, subjectivistic, and

capricious; and the achievement test scores of pupils...are limited in depth, scope, and validity" (p. 450).

Perhaps Ausubel is correct: We know little more today than we did 50 years ago when Hart reported that students respond to teachers who are kind, considerate, and helpful. However, one could look at the research from Maslow's perspective since he identified traits which relate to successful developmental educators. Instructors who are at the love/social level desire friendly relationships with students. At the esteem level, instructors desire achievement and independence. At the self-actualizing level, individuals realize their potential.

Although Greive (1984) suggests that students' motivation can be explained through Maslow's hierarchy of needs (pp. 59-66) with little difficulty, one could classify most of the qualities of superior instructors identified in research under Maslow's third, fourth, and fifth levels (see Table 1, p. 3). According to this analysis, over half of the items (56%) cited as characteristics of excellent instructors fell into Maslow's self-actualization category. The remainder of the items fell into the esteem category (32%) or the love/social category (12%). This pattern supports implications made by Greive (1984) that excellent instructors tend to be self-actualized individuals.

Another way of observing and analyzing these characteristics is through the employment of a frequency distribution. Although some of the items may be placed into several categories, Table 2 presents an interesting analysis.

Table 2

Characteristics of Successful Educators

Item	N	%
Understand students and self; meet needs	24	29
Possess teaching skills and knowledge	18	22
Demonstrate interest, motivation, enthusiasm	12	15
Organize, set and meet goals	9	11
Become involved with learners	8	10
Act in a friendly way	6	7
Demand excellence	5	6
Total	82	100

From this perspective, the excellent instructor is one who understands students and meets their needs because he has skills and knowledge, ability to generate motivation, and organizational talents. The instructor is also a friendly, involved person who demands excellence. In short, this analysis seems to echo the conclusions of the Hawthorne experiments and the folk wisdom of Peters and Waterman, Jr. (1982): "Nothing is more powerful than positive reinforcement" (p. 269). Given the analysis according to Maslow's needs and the frequency distribution, several implications can be drawn.

Implication 1: There is a difference between instructing and teaching/mentoring.

Those who instruct are expected to understand student needs and to meet the needs of students, but those who teach/mentor need more—a devotion to the cause: teaching/mentoring must be a matter of ultimate concern. This concern is what makes for great teachers—in addition, of course, to the instructors' knowledge of the theory and the practice of instructing. For excellent teachers, there is no line between work and play: teaching is a joy.

Implication 2: Instructors must demand excellence.

If Roueche and Watkins are correct about the value of engaging students and demanding excellence, how are instructors to do both without discouraging students? Roueche, Mink, and Armes (1981) suggest a type of coaching to help students avoid learned helplessness in the classroom. Their coaching components are demonstration, feedback, reinstruction, and prodding. The authors claim that these coaching techniques parallel traditional teaching techniques for developmental students—"active participation...small sequential learning units...corrective feedback...attention-directing procedures..." (p. 38).

Hodges (1986) proffers expectancy value theory as the solution to helping students avoid the learned helplessness syndrome. Students will work if they believe that their actions will lead to results, that the results will produce rewards, and that the rewards will be of value. He offers specific motivational techniques: (actions lead to results) teach effective study skills and point out the value of time on task; (results produce rewards) fair tests as demonstrated by an item analysis shared with students, instructors' pointing out the value of the course in the world of work, and previews of interesting topics; (rewards will be of value) relate the value of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the course to the student's individual values (pp. 1-2).

Implication 3: Instructors can become successful; attention to people is the key.

It may not be possible for a developmental education instructor to shape his personality to fit Maslow's fifth level configuration, although Thompson (1986) reported that Lowman feels that about one third of all instructors could become master teachers (p. 17). However, Maslow states that love and respect can be mastered by anyone (1970, p. 254). Is this what developmental students want or need in a teacher? Cross (1974) profiled an attractive college for new students as "...a friendly place where good teaching is emphasized and where faculty members take an interest in students..." (p. 77).

CONCLUSIONS

After at least 50 years of research and speculation, it may seem that we have done little more than reinvent Maslow. The list of qualities of excellent teachers often represents little more than someone's perceptions of the

ideal. Surveys of the qualities of excellent teachers may represent only a middle-class cultural bias toward the middle-class ego ideal—"Demonstrating the ultimate worthwhileness of, or personal commitment to, one's material/educational goals" (McKeachie, 1969, p. 50). The surveys may also be little more than a validation of the professoriat's interest in promoting personhood—"Being self-revealing in ways which clarify one's totality beyond the task at hand; being trustworthy and warm enough to encourage students to be open as well" (p. 51).

Some may argue that many of the surveys set out to prove the researchers' views. Others may argue that many surveys' methodologies are not above reproach.

Cross (1976) provided a rebuttal to such arguments: "Maslow believes that we will learn more about human beings by studying self-actualizing people than we will by research that looks for a statistical average in a natural setting" (p. 181). Maslow's theory was stimulated by his attempts to understand two teachers—individuals who were devoted to their cause; individuals for whom there was no work/joy distinction. Cross (1976) points out that "...[Maslow's] research on the characteristics of self-actualizing people is not research at all by traditional standards. He has a highly biased sample that violates all rules of statistical sampling. Nevertheless, there is support for his theory and it has generated considerable research" (p. 181).

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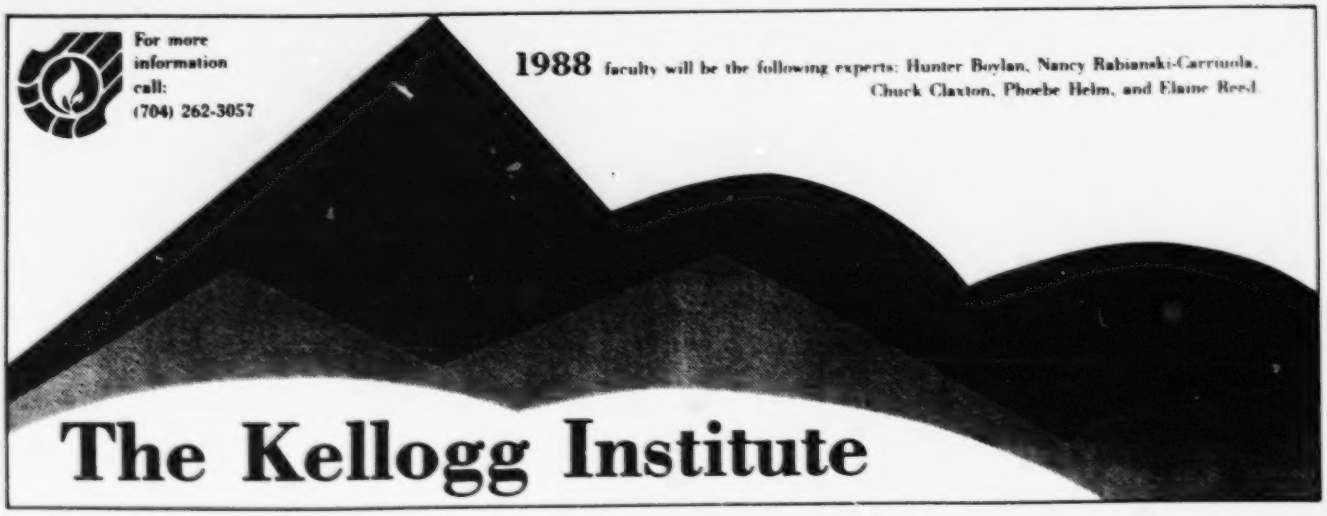
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MARCH 10 - 12, 1988. National Association of Developmental Education Twelfth Annual Conference, "Leadership Through Innovation," Orlando, FL. Contact: Dorothy Vandegrift: (305) 468-4725.

24 - 27, 1988. Western College Reading and Learning Association (WCRLA) Annual Conference, "Evaluation: Essential for Excellence," Sacramento, CA. Contact: Susan Deese: (505) 277-4560.

26, 1988. New York Metropolitan Association for Developmental Education (NYMADE) Fourth Annual Conference, "College Educators at the Crossroads: Merging the 80's into the 90's," NY, NY. Contact: Mavis Aldridge: (212) 489-5240.

APRIL 15 - 17, 1988. Sixth Annual NTNW (National Testing Network in Writing) Conference on Writing Assessment, Minneapolis, MN. Contact: Karen Greenberg: (212) 772-4000.

17 - 19, 1988. Eleventh Annual New York College Learning Skills Association (NYCLSA) Symposium on Developmental/Remedial Education, Ellenville, NY. Contact: Susan Huard: (716) 394-3500 ext. 389.

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